

1998 CLIMATE SUMMARY

1998 will go down as the 3rd warmest year since 1891. The warmest year was 1931. The winter of 1997-1998 was one of the warmest on record. "Meteorological winter" is often defined by climatologists as the months of December, January, and February. Minnesota experienced unusually mild temperatures in each of these months. The statewide average temperature for December 1997 was 23.6 degrees F, which is 10.8 degrees above normal. January's average temperature was a mild 14.0, above normal by 7.1 degrees. The month of February was extraordinarily warm averaging 28.0 degrees, exceeding the normal by 14.9 degrees. The temperature for the 1997-1998 meteorological winter (December - February) averaged 21.9 statewide, which places it second only to 1877-1878, the warmest Minnesota winter of the post-settlement era.

As the result of the warm temperatures and light snowfall, many areas of Minnesota reported little or no snow cover by late February. Historically, late February is the point of the winter season when the maximum snow depth is reached.

1998 was also a stormy year with 57 tornadoes, the largest number recorded in one year. A series of strong tornadoes hit south central Minnesota on March 29. A 1.25 mile-wide damage path was carved through the city of St. Peter in Nicollet County. Other towns devastated that day included Comfrey and Hanska in Brown County.

May was an especially active month for severe weather, with strong straight line winds, tornadoes, hail and heavy rainfall.

Fears of a widespread drought tapered off after a series of heavy rainstorms moved over southern Minnesota late in June. Very heavy rains fell across a large portion of southeastern Minnesota during the week ending June 28. Multi-day totals exceeding eight inches were reported in Scott, Rice and Goodhue Counties.

Very heavy rains also fell across much of Minnesota during the afternoon and evening of July 14. The heaviest of the rains fell in Otter Tail County in west central Minnesota and Cass County in north central Minnesota. More than five inches of rain fell in portions of these counties.

Summer continued right into autumn with warmer than normal temperatures. September 1998 was the 4th warmest since 1895 taken as an aggregate average from all reporting locations in Minnesota. The warm conditions continued right into December. The statewide average temperature was 2.6 degrees above normal in October and 3.6 degrees above normal in November. In the first week of December, Minnesota was about 19.3 Degrees above normal. The warm autumn was a continuation of warm temperatures experienced throughout much of 1998. An interesting artifact of this warmth was the number of days without below zero temperatures in many southern Minnesota communities.

Despite a rather tranquil autumn, there was one winter storm that stood out. On November 10, a "Land Hurricane" swept across the state. Winds gusted in the 50 mph to 60 mph over parts of central and southern Minnesota. The all-time lowest barometric pressure record was broken. The 28.43 reading at Austin and Albert Lea broke the old record of 28.55 that was set in Duluth on January 11, 1975. Some heavy snow fell with this storm across west central Minnesota, with Canby in Yellow Medicine County receiving 13.5 inches of snow. 1998 ended with a return to normal winter-like temperatures in late December to remind everyone that this is still Minnesota after all.

Overall, it was a moist year across Minnesota. The northeast and southwest sections of the state were very dry during the growing season. However, autumn rains made up for the deficiency. By the end of the year parts of southeast Minnesota and northwest Minnesota had as much as 10 inches above the normal annual precipitation. There were only a few isolated areas of the state that had slightly less than a normal precipitation year.

Source: STATE CLIMATOLOGY OFFICE, DNR - DIVISION OF WATERS

